**Structured Small Group Program**

**Title**

“Chillin’ Out”

**Goal/ Purpose**

The purpose of the “Chillin’ Out” group is to educate students about the affects of stress and methods to help reduce their stress levels and negative consequences of stress. Students will learn and be able to explain the negative and positive effects of stress within group session activities by earning a grade of 85% or higher on an exam about the affects of stress by the end of group sessions. Group members will implement, practice and discuss coping skills. Group members will also improve their stress-related negative behavior by 30% as observed by teachers, administrators and parents by the end of the group sessions.

**Population**

The group will be composed of six male and female students from 7th and 8th grade, who have been identified as having high stress levels by teachers, parents and administrators.

**Rationale/ Need**

Stress management is a major need in middle-school aged adolescents. In fact, Finkelstein et al. (2007) differentiated stress in the adolescent period as having both psychological and environmental perspectives of stressful events. Stress leads to many negative emotions and behaviors like outburst of anger, headache, nausea and sleep deprivation (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2005). Recent research (e.g., Smith, Glazer, Ruiz, & Gallo, 2004) suggests that negative emotions like hostility, anger, and aggressiveness are heart disease risk factors. Pirker-Binder & Lang stated that “There are many ways to indicate stress: headaches, an increase in migraine attacks, aggressive behavior, anxiety disorders, sleeping problems, stomach pain, hyperactivity and depression” (2005).

Stress management education and applications are a normative need. The need for a stress management small group has been assessed firstly by the means of classroom behavior reports by teachers. Teachers have come to me explaining their concern for certain students in their classroom. Parents have also brought to my attention that their child is under acute stress. Lastly, a stress level survey (Perceived Stress Scale) was compiled and administered to children in the classroom. Those receiving high scores were considered to participate in the small group.

**Theoretical Orientation**

The theoretical approach that will be used in the stress management small group is Reality Therapy. Reality therapy promotes the experience of being in the “here and now” (Corey, 2012). The underlying theory (Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs) that students’ basic needs must be met prior to therapeutic success is what drives this theory. The developmental stage of adolescents tends to be centered on finding identity and role in society. The “here and now” approach uses techniques to pin point what a child wants, what they are currently doing, evaluating the self and setting short term goals to improve in a problem behavior. This theory puts the responsibility on the student for their own actions and consequences. The professional school counselor takes and active role in guiding a group through this process.

**Ethical. Legal, and Multicultural Issues**

The professional school counselor has a role in preventing harm for a student. The role that they should play is an advocate for their students, creating a safe environment to share feelings. They must not cross legal or ethical boundaries. Ethics codes are published specifically for this reason, to provide rules and boundaries. The ACA code of ethics also states that “Counselors communicate information in ways that are both developmentally and culturally appropriate” (ACA, 2005, A.2.c). It is pertinent that students understand their role and responsibilities in a group and are communicated with at a developmentally appropriate level.

The ACA code discusses the circumstances in which confidentiality can be breached and the importance of the respect of client’s rights. If a student is to express the intent to harm themselves or another person, it is the professional school counselor’s duty to warn and breach confidentiality. This circumstance is mentioned in the ASCA in Section A.2.b. The circumstances of breaching confidentiality are on all informed consent forms which are required to be signed before participation. Students will be reminded that what is talked about in group must stay confidential and is must not be mentioned outside of group.

**Recruitment and Screening**

Adolescents are recruited mainly through referral from teachers and administrators. A consent form was sent home with every student in 7th and 8th grades to grant or deny permission to participate in the Perceived Stress Scale. Students were given one week to turn in the form. The survey was then administered to students in the classroom and collected. Students scoring very high on the Stress Scale were screened for appropriateness of group counseling. After students were identified, I meet with individual students in my office and I performed interviews. Prior to an interview, I looked through the school file for any history of aggression or something that may hinder the group process. In these interviews, I informed the students about the group structure, what the goals for the group were and the ethic of confidentiality. The interview process took a total of just under one business week. If the student expressed interest, I sent them home with a consent form to have their parents sign (see attached). One week later, the group was ready to start. The recruitment and screen process took a total of three weeks.

**Structure**

This psychoeducational group is a six session closed group consisting of six weeks. It will meet in the counseling office at Feel Good Middle School on Wednesdays from 12-12:30pm during the lunch period. This group will be offered three times a year.

**Core ASCA Standard(s)**

ASCA Standard A.2.a.

ASCA Standard A.6

**Core State Academic Standard(s)**

Visual Art Virginia SOL 7.19

Visual Art Virginia SOL 8.16

Virginia Health SOL 7.2.a

Virginia Health SOL 8.1.a

**Objectives**

Students will perform self evaluation and identify at least two different types of personal reactions that they experienced from stress over the course of one group session. Students will perform a coping mechanism to reduce their perceived stress levels throughout the course of a group session which will be self evaluated by using a pre-session and post session rating scale. Group member’s overall stress levels reported on the pre and post self evaluated rating scale will reduce over the course of the six sessions by 40% as documented in counseling notes. Students will apply coping mechanisms to their classroom and home environment and successfully complete 80% of assigned homework. Group members will improve by reducing their stress-related behavior by 20% after session four, and 40% after session six as observed by teachers, administrators and parents. Students will understand how to work cooperatively in a small group by demonstrating efficient team work performance throughout group acidities as observed by the professional school counselor.

**Program Evaluation**

Students will be evaluated throughout the counseling sessions on new knowledge that has been acquired. Multiple choice and true and false quizzes will be a part of the curriculum for later sessions. Most of the objectives are evaluated through observation from the counselor or teachers. Program notes will always be taken to record each session. Materials to be evaluated include the Perceived Stress Scale, teacher behavior reports and parent communication. Teachers will report student’s behavioral progress weekly during and after the session commences. Scores on the progress reports will be compared and analyzed through the program SPSS. Behavior report scores will be coded and converted into a chart which can be used to provide a visual of actual progress. The Perceived Stress Scale will be taken for a second time in the last session of the group. This will allow the scores to be compared to one another. A percentage of improvement or regression can be calculated and compared to see whether the objective for a reduction in stress level was made. This will allow valuable empirical quantitative and qualitative data to be obtained and presented if need be.

**Session 1**

**Title:** “Chillin’ out”

**Duration:** 25 Minutes

**Brief Summary of Session:** This is an introductory session. The topics on stress management that will be discussed throughout all of the sessions will be summarized. Getting to know you activities will be preformed like answering questions and using creative arts to create a flag with personality characteristics. The structure of the group will be explained. The professional school counselor will facilitate the group in creating their own positive rules. The importance of confidentiality will also be emphasized. The group is closed with the assigning of homework to become self-aware of stress that may be present in daily life.

**Theoretical Orientation:** The theoretical orientation is reality therapy. It will be implemented through the techniques used throughout the session.

**Specific Group Technique:** Self evaluation will be performed by each of the students. During each session, they will be asked to evaluate their wants and set short term goals to meet those wants. Initiating, linking, summarizing and supporting will be used during each of the sessions. The counselor will demonstrate an environment that is safe and facilitate group cohesiveness. Homework is also assigned at the end of each session.

**Materials/ Media:** Construction paper, scissors, markers and crayons

**Core ASCA Standard(s):** The importance of maintaining confidentiality is also mentioned within the group session as well which is discussed in the ASCA handbook throughout section A.2.a.

**Core State Academic Standard(s):** Visual Art Virginia SOL 7.19 and 8.16

**Objectives:** Students will understand how to work cooperatively in a small group by demonstrating efficient team work performance throughout group activities as observed by the professional school counselor.

**Assessments**: One of the methods of assessment for the group will be a self-assessment that each of the group members performs at the beginning and end of each session. The group members will also be assessed on the knowledge that they have of their peers and the rules that they have established which will be observed through questioning and answering.

**Procedures/ Instructional Strategy:**

1) Introduce yourself to the group and explain what goals that you have for the group sessions to help with stress reduction. (2 minutes)

2) Discuss the meaning of stress (2 minutes) The general meaning is highlighted in the journal article written by Kraag, et al. in 2006 (p. 451).

3) Request that each of the group members introduce their name give one fact that they think their group mates would not know about themselves. Quiz the group members by having them repeat back other member’s unique fact (2 minutes)

4) Pass out construction paper, markers, scissors and crayons to each of the group members and request that they create a flag with five aspects of themselves represented on the flag (5 minutes)

5) When the flag is completed, have the students share their flags with the group. (5 minutes)

6) Transition into discussing the importance of group rules

7) Request for the students to come up with positive rules that they would like to have implemented. (5 minutes)

8) Ask a group member to write the group rules up on a piece of paper with colorful markers.

9) Discuss the importance of confidentiality (2 minutes)

10) Close the session by assigning a homework assignment. Instruct the students to be become aware over the next week of how stress affects them the most in their daily lives. This will be discussed next session (1 minute)

**Homework/ Ownwork**: Instruct the students to be become aware over the next week of how stress affects them the most in their daily lives. This will be discussed in the next session.

**Group Stage and Emerging Issues:** This group is in the initial stage and the very first session after a pre-interview and introduction meeting. Issues that may arise are feelings of anxiety as group members are trying to find their place within the group. Some members may be withdrawn, seeing a safe environment.

**Session 2**

**Title:** “Chillin’ out”

**Brief Summary of Session:** The group session will begin with a request for the students to rate their stress level on a scale of 0 to 10. The reason for the rating will be discussed. The students will complete a self evaluation on how their bodies may be affected by stress. The professional school counselor will explain why the physical symptoms happen and what is going on in the body. Coping mechanisms will be discussed and suggested by the students and counselor. A visual relaxation activity will be preformed and discussed as a coping mechanism.

**Theoretical Orientation:** The theoretical orientation is reality therapy. It will be implemented through the techniques used throughout the session.

**Specific Group Technique:** Self evaluation will be is performed by each of the students. During each session, they will be asked to evaluate their wants and set short term goals to meet those wants. Initiating, linking, summarizing and supporting will be used during each of the sessions. Blocking will be used to re-direct conversation to promote the working stage. The counselor will facilitate relaxation techniques within the group. Homework is also assigned.

**Duration:** 25 minutes

**Materials/ Media:** The group materials include handouts, pens and pencils.

**Core ASCA Standard(s):** ASCA Standard A.6., Section f. talks about using solution focused, group facilitation to work with a variety of academic, career, college and “personal/ social issues” (ASCA, 2005, p. 144). The importance of maintaining confidentiality is also mentioned within the group session as well which is discussed in the ASCA handbook throughout section A.2.a.

**Core State Academic Standard(s):** The academic standard that is covered is the Virginia Standard of Learning for health section 7.2.a and 8.1.a

**Objectives:** Students will perform self evaluation and identify at least two different types of personal reactions that they experienced from stress. Students will perform a coping mechanism to reduce their perceived stress levels throughout the course of a group session which will be self evaluated by using a pre-session and post session rating scale.

**Assessments**: The description of coping mechanisms used to manage stress will be measured by observation within the group session. One of the methods of assessment for the group will be a self-assessment that each of the group members performs at the beginning and end of each session.

**Procedures/ Instructional Strategy:**

* 1. Begin the session with a friendly welcome
  2. Request that each of the students rate their stress level at this current moment on a scale from 1 (being most relaxed) to 10 (being most stressed) and ask why they have chosen to give this rating. (5 minutes)
  3. Transition into the topic “Stress and the body” and ask the group members to give examples of physical affects that they may have experienced throughout the past few weeks (2 minutes)
  4. Have the group members complete the Symptom of Stress Handout to rate their experiences (3 minutes)
  5. Have the group members discuss and share their answers for questions one and two (3 minutes)
  6. Continue to the next Handout labeled “Cold Hand, Fast Heart”
  7. Have each student take turns and read through each symptom identified with the body (3 minutes)
  8. Perform the visualization activity found in the Handout “Stress Reduction Activities for Students” attached in the appendix Kraag et al. concluded in their meta-analysis study that coping mechanisms should be taught in the school system (2006). (5 minutes)
  9. Have the students rate their stress level from 1 to 10 once more. Discuss why the rating may have changed throughout the group session. (2 minutes)
  10. Close the session by assigning homework. The homework assignment should be to implement two of the coping mechanisms learned in group (2 minutes)

**Homework/ Ownwork**: Each of the group members will be assigned to practice coping mechanisms throughout the following week. Examples are provided on a worksheet. Alternative coping mechanisms will also be encouraged.

**Group Stage and Emerging Issues:** The work stage is the working stage. Some conflictmay arise between group members. In a brief narrative, identify any issue that may arise due to content and group stage.Identify the group stage.

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Perceived Stress Scale

**Instructions: The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during**

**the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate by circling how often you felt or**

**thought a certain way. (Response values: 0=never, 1=almost never, 2=sometimes, 3=fairly**

**often; 4=very often).**

In the last month, how often have you:

1) Been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

2) Felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

3) Felt nervous and ―stressed‖?

4) Felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

5) Felt that things were going your way?

6) Found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?

7) Been able to control irritations in your life?

8) Felt that you were on top of things?

9) Been angered because of things that were outside of your control?

10) Felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

To score this measure, reverse the scores for the positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, and 8),

such that a score of 4 will become a score of 0, a score of 3 will become a score of 1, and so on.

Next, sum the reverse-scored items with the remaining 6 items. Scores range from 0 to 40. This

scale has no diagnostic cut-offs. Higher scores correspond to a higher level of perceived stress.

[A four-item version of this scale (PSS-4), which includes questions 2, 4, 5, and 10, has been tested as well.

Questions 2 and 10 have also been used to assess stress as part of a baseline questionnaire that Child Trends helped

to develop for a large-scale evaluation.]